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ABSTRACT

Following the failure of several school levies, the Cincinnati Public School System placed a $9.83 million levy on the ballot in 1991 which passed in spite of tremendous odds against it. The Cincinnati tax levy campaign was successful largely because it adapted to the unique nature of ballot issue campaigns. First, it provided proactive leadership through public relations professionals and the school superintendent. Second, it activated voters through registration, endorsements, and volunteers. Finally, the complex issues of the campaign were simplified, audiences targeted, and language strategies employed. In this process, the essential functions of communication present in successful issue campaigns were satisfied: education; trust development; promotion of a positive image; and neutralization of the opposition. The challenges of these campaigns provide the communication scholar with intriguing questions about the rhetorical nature of ballot issue campaigns. A persuasive strategy that proved to be effective in Cincinnati may well be successful in other cities. (Contains 45 references.) (RS)

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# COMMUNICATION IN BALLOT ISSUE CAMPAIGNS: A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE 1991 CINCINNATI PUBLIC SCHOOLS LEVY CAMPAIGN

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ABSTRACT

COMMUNICATION IN BALLOT ISSUE CAMPAIGNS:

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CINCINNATI PUBLIC SCHOOLS LEVY CAMPAIGN

Like other school districts across the country, recent years have been difficult for the Cincinnati Public School System. Following the failure of several school levies, it verged on financial chaos. In 1991, the school board placed a 9.83 mill levy on the ballot. In spite of tremendous odds against it, the levy passed.

This study analyzes those elements in the public relations campaign which preceded this remarkable reversal of public opinion. The unique features of ballot issue campaigns are explained and then the communication used in the 1991 levy campaign is examined in light of these features. The authors conclude that the campaign succeeded because it responded to the unique rhetorical requirements of the situation.

# COMMUNICATION IN BALLOT ISSUE CAMPAIGNS:
# A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE 1991
# CINCINNATI PUBLIC SCHOOLS LEVY CAMPAIGN

In the fall of 1991, the Cincinnati Public School System faced a tremendous fiscal challenge. A tax levy during the previous year failed and the school system slipped into state receivership, a form of bankruptcy for public agencies. As a final effort in 1991, the school board placed a 9.83 mill levy on the ballot.[1] According to a poll conducted by the Cincinnati Post, while almost 80 percent of Cincinnati voters would agree to accept higher taxes if they thought it would help children get a better education, "only about 43 percent of voters say they back the district's 9.83-mill levy on the November ballot." (October 11, 1991). This poll, conducted just three weeks before election day, summarizes the challenge faced by the 1991 levy campaign managers. Public opinion had eroded to the point where citizens had little faith in the future of the Cincinnati Public School System (Cincinnati Post, October 11, 1991). Al Tuchfarber, a political scientist at the University of Cincinnati, gave the school board a 5 percent chance of passing the levy (C. Schultze, personal interview, March 2, 1992). In spite of these odds, the levy passed. The victory was "nothing short of a miracle" according to Chuck Schultze, president of Cincinnatians Active to Support Education or CASE (personal interview, March 2, 1992).

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the pivotal elements in the public relations campaign which preceded this remarkable reversal of public opinion. We will begin with the examination of the unique features of ballot issue campaigns and then proceed to a discussion of the 1991 Cincinnati School levy campaign.

## Ballot Issue Campaigns

In recent years, ballot issue campaigns have increased dramatically both in number and importance.[2] In 1980, 185 ballot proposals appeared in 18 states. By 1988, 238 statewide ballot issue proposals were voted on in 41 states, along with thousands of local ballot proposals ("Referendum's Rising Importance," 1980; Carlin and Carlin, p. 231). This dramatic increase in the use of direct legislation from 1980 demonstrates the rising importance of ballot issues in American politics ("Referendum's Rising Importance," 1980).

Ranging from traditional issues such as bonds and taxes to volatile social questions such as smoking, gay rights, nuclear power plants, and official state languages, direct voter participation promises to alter the nature of traditional governance. According to Prentice and Carlin, "With the growing use of initiative and referendum by both state and local governments . . . citizens are playing a more direct role in shaping public policy" (1987, p. 1). Some have argued that this type of grass-roots campaign represents the future of political persuasion in the United States (Hall 1983 p. 1; Carlin and Carlin p. 230). As the importance of ballot issue campaigns increases across the country, so too does the relevance of studying these campaigns.

However, most rhetorical critics have concentrated on single-candidate, national campaigns--usually, presidential ones.[3] This limits our understanding of the political process, focusing attention on the largest, seemingly most important campaigns. While the study of presidential campaigns is certainly both valid and enlightening, it ignores other types of campaigns.

In addition, rhetorical theories that are designed to appraise political candidate campaigns are of limited utility for the analysis of ballot issue campaigns because fundamental differences exist between them.[4] Ranney

identified three unique characteristics of ballot issue campaigns that are essential in understanding their communication dimensions: First, political parties are usually much less active and prominent in referendum campaigns. This creates an organizational vacuum; it also removes party labels that for most voters in candidate elections are the most powerful indicators of which contestants merit support. Second, the special nature and requirements of the mass communications media, particularly television, make it more difficult to portray the pros and cons of propositions than candidates' records and personalities. Finally, the absence of party labels in referendums deprives them of much of the structure and continuity that usually characterize candidate elections. This, in turn, makes it more difficult to inform and activate voters in referendum campaigns (1981, p. 91).

This paper will focus on how the Cincinnati school levy campaign successfully adapted to these three obstacles in ballot issue campaigns. We will examine each barrier in turn and determine how the campaign surmounted it.

## Background

Since the first organized tax levy was presented to Cincinnati voters in 1915, there has been a tax levy on the ballot approximately every other year.[5] Of the 46 attempted levies between 1915 and 1990, 33 carried and 13 failed, a 71.7% success rate (Leslie & Siefferman, 1991).

Throughout the first half of the century, the school district received overwhelming support from the people of Cincinnati and the levy campaign organizers had to do little but put up a few signs announcing that a tax levy would be on the ballot. Both levies that failed during those years were close races; one lost 52% to 48% (1921) and the other lost 51% to 49% (1936).

However, during the mid 1960's public support for school levies changed. Between 1966 and 1979, Cincinnati Public Schools lost 10 of 14 levy attempts, including six in a row from 1972 to 1979 (Leslie & Siefferman, 1991). This left the school district in dire straights. During that decade, inflation and the cost of living rose considerably, and the school district suffered additional setback as the purchasing power of the dollar declined.

The Cincinnati Public Schools' 1990 tax levy campaign, "Vote FOR Kids," again failed to pass. In spite of the high voter turnout, the levy lost by over 16,000 votes (57% to 43%) in what most citizens perceived to be a landslide defeat ("1991 School Levy Result Summary," 1991). Contributing to the levy failure were nationwide anti-tax sentiment, a drop in Cincinnati students' achievement scores, widely-reported problems with discipline, organized opposition, fairly negative media attention, and general public irritation with the quality of education (Leslie & Siefferman, 1991, p. 1). Much of the blame for these problems fell on superintendent Lee Etta Powell.

Following the 1990 levy defeat, dramatic changes were made which are reflected in the 1991 ballot initiative. Those changes adapt to the unique rhetorical nature of the ballot issue campaign and account for the overwhelming success of the 1991 tax levy campaign (Bitzer, 1968, pp. 10-11).

## 1: Organization

A primary limitation in ballot issue campaigns is that they often function in an organizational vacuum. Lacking the clear political party affiliations and organizational structure present in candidate campaigns, ballot issue campaigns are often loosely connected and sometimes chaotic. Three changes between 1990 and 1991 provided the essential leadership structure needed for a successful campaign. These included hiring public

relations professionals to conduct the campaign, featuring new school superintendent J. Michael Brandt as spokesperson for the levy, and developing proactive responses to reluctant voters.

Public Relations Professionals. Consultants hired to assess the 1990 levy defeat suggested that while it was "important to retain all of the aspects of "grassroots" campaigning . . .campaign strategy and the ability to quickly respond to crisis must be improved" (Leslie and Siefferman, 1991, p. 18). This recommendation resulted in the hiring of Brewster Rhodes, a professional campaign manager. The practical strategic leadership provided by Rhodes was crucial to the success of the levy. For the first time, one person coordinated long-term planning and daily operations. This allowed campaigners to spend the first five months of 1991 in damage repair and consensus building and the second five months in active campaigning.

While the campaign was run by public relations professionals, J. Michael Brant, new superintendent of Cincinnati schools, assumed visible leadership. Not only did voters see and hear Brandt on television and radio, but his picture and signature were featured on campaign literature. Because much voter dissatisfaction stemmed from disapproval of former superintendent Lee Etta Powell, the campaign associated the new superintendent with reform. An editorial in the Cincinnati Post reveals this sentiment: "Indeed, the selection of Brandt as superintendent--who ascended to the district s top post directly from the trenches of a high school rather than through the insulated administrative bureaucracy--is a sign that business as usual will no longer do" (October, 1991, p. 10A). Even though her name was never mentioned, Powell became the scapegoat for the school district, while Brandt became its savior.

Following the recommendations of the Buenger Commission, Brandt took an

additional leadership step, announcing the elimination of 142 jobs in the district's downtown office. The district would save $16 million during the next two years because of the restructuring (Reeves, 1992). The announcement was well-received by the citizens of Cincinnati. Krista Ramsey (1992) of the Cincinnati Enquirer stated: "Brandt gave Cincinnatians a cause for hope. . . It will be a system that serves. Not a bloated flow-chart of administrators, but one that, finally, serves children" (p. B-1). By streamlining administration, Brandt signalled leadership that served voter interests.

J. Michael Brandt. While the replacement of superintendent Lee Etta Powell with J. Michael Brandt, was a visible gesture, Brandt also played a key role in this election because he was depicted as a candidate. Much of the campaign literature and media coverage focused on Brandt as a catalyst for change, a symbol of reform.

The critical message reaching many of the voters in Cincinnati was the 30 second television commercial starring Superintendent J. Michael Brandt.[6] While this commercial certainly had other functions such as educating voters on the changes that were taking place, it spotlighted the changes in leadership.

According to levy campaign organizers, this commercial was crucial to the success of the levy. In fact, exactly half of the entire campaign budget was spent on this advertisement. (C. Schultze, personal interview, March 2, 1992).

A secondary type of leadership utilized by the campaign was the endorsements of prominent individuals.[7] The levy had the personal support of Governor George Voinovich and Archbishop Daniel E. Pilarczyk. But the individual who brought the most attention to the school levy campaign was the

Rev. Jesse Jackson. One day before the election, Jackson spoke in Cincinnati urging passage of the school levy. Jackson stated:

> This levy is about productivity, it's about world competition, it's about putting America back to work, it's about an alternative to welfare and despair, it's about dignity and self-respect, it's about a better Cincinnati, it's about a better Ohio, it's about a better America (J. Jackson, videotape, November 4, 1991).

Jackson bolstered the levy with his personal credibility. Another benefit of Jackson's endorsement was increased media coverage. Jackson's appearance was featured on every major television and radio station in the Cincinnati area bringing further attention to the levy campaign.

Proactive Leadership. Campaign managers began to take action even before the school levy campaign began with proactive steps to enhance the image of the Cincinnati school system (Chuck Schultze, personal interview, March 2, 1992). The mayor's soapbox on education, the Buenger Report, and the new school policies all helped create a positive environment.

On September 5, the "Cincinnati Business Committee Task Force on Public Schools: Report & Recommendations," commonly known as the Buenger Report, was published. This study, conducted by members of the local business community, evaluated the operation of the city's public schools and recommend improvements. The Buenger Report "slammed hard at the administration, but also paved a way for things to change" (personal interview, March 2, 1992). Campaign organizers presented the findings of the Buenger Commission as the light at the end of a tunnel. This provided the voters with an image of the school system as a progressive, improving organization.

The development of a positive image was reinforced by the Mayor's

"Soapbox on Education." Thirty different sessions were held all over the school district. These soapbox meetings gave citizens the chance to air their complaints about the school system. Over 2,000 people attended sessions and, for the first time in many years, the people of Cincinnati felt that they had some impact on school policy.

Bolstered by the recommendations of the Buenger Commission Report, the school board began to pass tighter scholastic policies, including "no-pass, no-play" sports policy, rigid new discipline guidelines, and stronger attendance standards. This was orchestrated with an emphasis on informing the public about positive changes. For example, a press conference was held to announce the implementation of the new discipline policy. Later in the campaign, voters were reminded of the new discipline policy when the school board announced 5,000 suspensions in the first quarter of the school year. In addition, a new attendance policy mandated parental contact for every unauthorized absence and allowed the superintendent to revoke driver's licenses of chronic truants, and to issue court citations for parents of habitually truant students (Fact Book, 1991). The school board also announced a crackdown on "social promotion," the practice of passing students even when they should be held back, and the implementation of tougher graduation requirements (J. Leslie, personal interview, December 20, 1991). To further promote the new image, improved achievement scores were revealed--10.8 percent in mathematics, 9.3 percent in language, and 5.2 percent in reading (Fact Book, 1991).

2: Activation

Many initiative and referenda campaigns fit the category of "minimal-information elections." That is, in an issue campaign voters will typically

be presented with less information than in a candidate race. Minimal-information elections tend to produce "little ego-involvement, interest, and turnout" (Carlin & Carlin, 1989, p. 231). Minimal information results from characteristics of ballot issue campaigns--limited funds, special restrictions on election promotions, and highly complex issues that are often difficult to communicate in effective electronic messages (Carlin and Carlin, p. 231).

In a study of minimal-information campaigns, Fleitas (1971) reached two conclusions that have implications for ballot issue campaigns: Voters who possess little information "are apt to formulate a decision on almost any information that comes their way" (p. 434) and voters with peripheral interest represent the majority in minimal-information campaigns. In ballot issue campaigns, voters often have little ego-involvement, and thus spend little time considering the issue.

In order to develop Cincinnati voter involvement, three strategies were employed: Voter registration, extensive use of personal endorsements and recruitment of a large volunteer corps.

Voter Registration. One of the most effective strategies for fighting opposition to the school levy came in the form of voter registration. In the summer of 1991, a Cincinnati Public School survey found that 70% of district parents were not registered to vote. It rapidly became apparent that a large portion of potential YES voters were not voting at all. The campaign reacted to this information by mounting a comprehensive registration drive. Levy campaign volunteers made 85,000 phone calls to parents in the district. Before the end of the campaign, over 600 teachers had been made deputy registrars, and 6,000 new voters had been registered (J. Leslie, personal interview, December 20, 1991). This was a major success for the campaign

because 85 to 90 percent of newly registered voters potentially would vote yes (Campbell, 1989, p. 23).

According to campaign manager Brewster Rhodes (1991), "The turnout of 53.3% was the highest in an 'off' year election in at least a decade and was nearly as high as the 1990 gubernatorial election" (p. 1). In 1990, the voter turnout was 56.4%; in 1989, 45.4%; in 1987, 45.7%. The increase in 1991 was probably due to newly registered voters.

Other evidence of the success of the voter registration drive is seen in the high correlation between the number of additional voters in each ward in 1991 and the number of additional votes for the levy. For example, in the College Hill neighborhood, there was an increase of 1,036 new voters in 1991. In that same neighborhood, there were 1,048 more votes for the levy compared to 1990. Overall, support was up in each of the 29 city districts (Rhodes, 1991, p. 2).

Endorsements. The primary way in which this campaign attempted to gain the trust of the voters was through endorsements. According to Hamilton and Cohen (1974), "Endorsements by organizations and prominent individuals should be trumpeted. Voting is influenced tremendously by affiliations and reference groups; it is more of a social than an individual act" (p. 107). Four sources of endorsements were utilized: (1) organizations (2) prominent individuals (3) teachers and principals, and (4) ordinary citizens. Not only did campaign organizers seek out endorsements, but unsolicited endorsements rolled in almost every day (Leslie, personal interview, December 20, 1991). These endorsements were featured in campaign literature.

The 1991 levy campaign received endorsements from literally hundreds of different organizations, representing every major group and organization in

Cincinnati--Cincinnati Bar Association, Black Taxpayers Association, Cincinnati City Council, the Republican Party, the Democratic Party, NAACP, League of Women Voters, Cincinnati Housewives League, Baptist Ministers Conference, and the Cincinnati Youth Collaborative (Schultze, personal interview, March 2, 1992).

The 1991 campaign initially tapped the business community when CASE asked the Cincinnati Business Committee to form the Buenger Commission. The net result was to cement a powerful alliance with Cincinnati businesses. With the implementation of the Buenger Report reforms, the school district further developed rapport with community businesses.

Finally, ordinary citizens provided peer endorsements. For example, residents of Pleasant Ridge received "Here's what your Pleasant Ridge neighbors are saying about Issue 7," a mailing featuring statements of five to seven neighborhood residents. Presumably, the targeted voters could identify with the people quoted in the flyers because of their common geographic location. Citizens were also asked to endorse the campaign by signing petitions. The sole purpose of the petitions was to encourage positive behavior in voters. Hopefully, going to the polls and voting would spring from the relatively simple act of signing a petition.

Broad levy support throughout the district was also demonstrated in the "human billboard." On Monday, November 4, late afternoon drivers saw an estimated 10,000 levy supporters lining sidewalks and holding pro-levy signs near 85 Cincinnati Public School buildings. According to Jene Galvin, billboard organizer and chair of the Cincinnati Federation of Teachers Political Action Committee, "We are looking for a dramatic demonstration of the bandwagon phenomenon that we're feeling in the closing moments of the

campaign" (CASE News Release, November 1, 1991).

Volunteers. Another indicator of levy support was the dramatic increase in volunteers. While the 1990 campaign recruited 300 volunteers, the 1991 campaign had 3,000 volunteers at its disposal (Leslie, personal interview, December 20, 1991). The volunteer pool formed a tangible voter base. Initially, large rallies provided volunteer-voters with new information. Later, information was supplemented in a weekly flyer, published by CASE, and circulated to every campaign volunteer. This flyer was the primary way in which the campaign organizers communicated with the 3,000 volunteers. These flyers served to up-date and motivate volunteers.

Many Cincinnati educators were also featured in the campaign. Teachers and principals provided personal endorsements. For example, Paula Hanley, a science teacher from Western Hills High School stated, "The message is clear. Without the passage of this levy it is our children who will suffer" ("A Message From," p. 4). The Cincinnati Federation of Teachers also published a flyer entitled "Why Teachers Support Issue 7" that was mailed to Cincinnati residents. From it, voters learned that 97 percent of Cincinnati teachers supported the new discipline policies. Campaigners also attempted to gain the support of the voters by mailing 20,000 handwritten postcards from Cincinnati School students to voters.

## 3: Issue Development

The final, and perhaps most fundamental, difference between issue and candidate campaigns is that ballot issue campaigns necessitate discussion of "the issues." However, issue development is not easily conducted through the mass media typically employed in candidate races. This is due, in part, to the constraints under which the broadcast media must operate. Swanson (1977)

claims that "drama is the key to campaign reporting because of the need for network news to reduce an entire day's activities into a few minutes while simultaneously providing entertainment to ensure ratings" (p. 241). Many issue campaigns lack what Swanson calls "melodramatic imperative" (p. 241). The result is that highly complex issues, like school finance elections, must go beyond the typical image creation strategies inherent in candidate media campaigns.

In order to combat this problem, the campaign developed three predominating strategies: targeting specific audiences, reducing complex issues to tangible, personal examples, and finally, exploiting specific language strategies to enhance their messages.

Audience Targeting. As already noted, voters were targeted geographically by neighborhoods. The campaign also targeted certain groups. In particular, a strong appeal was directed at Catholic voters since those with children in private or parochial schools have traditionally not supported tax increases for public education. Catholic parents were sent two special mailings. The first, "7 Reasons Why Parents Who Send Their Children to Private or Parochial Schools Should Support Issue 7," included a copy of Archbishop Pilarczyk's letter of endorsement. The second mailing was a letter from J. Michael Brandt. It attempted to gain voter trust by recognizing the special interests of parents who preferred parochial schools.

Simplified Issues. Political scientists have noted that tax issues are particularly difficult to pass because people are naturally inclined to vote NO unless they are given compelling reasons to do otherwise (Ranney, 1981 and Carlin and Carlin, 1989). In such cases, education of voters is a key element in the campaign. The challenge for campaigners is to overcome voter

reluctance by convincing them that benefits of the tax increase outweigh the personal costs (Carlin and Carlin, p. 235).

According to Banach (1986), "Facts and logic, by themselves, rarely sell anything. If your campaign literature is a series of statistics and pie charts, you're headed for trouble. These materials have to be translated into language people can understand . . .and most people don't understand multi-million dollar school budgets" (p. 18). Most of the educational messages were personalized direct mailings. According to Jan Leslie of the Cincinnati Public Schools, the campaign organizers attempted to reach each potential voter with at least five different mailings (personal interview, December 20, 1991).

To enhance voter understanding of complex issues, each mailing had a distinct purpose and focused on simplified issues. For example, The 1991 Levy Fact Book provided answers to common questions. Like other campaign messages, The Fact Book explained the reforms taking place in the public schools. For example, the first question asked, "What is the new superintendent/school district doing about some of the issues that face this urban school district?" The answer outlined the new discipline policy, educating voters with specific details. Thus, reform was associated with the new discipline policy. This question also reminded voters that Brandt was new as the campaign attempted to break from the past administrative failures. In essence the campaign argued that new leadership voided old criticisms. Portions of The Fact Book were periodically inserted into the Cincinnati Enquirer, Cincinnati Herald, Cincinnati Post, and Catholic Telegraph, broadening voter exposure to the campaign, reinforcing previous messages, and chipping away at opposition to the tax levy.

Besides natural resistance to tax increases, the levy campaign faced organized opposition from Citizens for Educational Diversity (CED). CED advocated parental choice, claiming that defeat of the levy would force the school board to issue vouchers allowing parents to select which school their children would attend. CED favored vouchers.

This argument was neutralized through the direct use of fear appeals. The campaign messages insisted that defeat would not lead to a voucher system but, in fact, would bankrupt the system. A vote for the tax levy became a vote to keep Cincinnati schools out of bankruptcy and free from state control.

Language Strategies. Association of "reform" with the school levy functioned to simplify complex campaign issues. Reform encompassed everything from streamlined administration to stricter classroom discipline implying change in a positive direction. This single word permeated campaign messages and summarized what voters wanted to hear.

Another strategy included comparing the Cincinnati school district to surrounding districts. Such comparisons were sprinkled throughout the campaign, depicting Cincinnati as a school district on the cutting edge of public education. For example, in "A Message From the Superintendent," J. Michael Brandt told voters, "The Board just mandated graduation requirements that are the toughest of any big city school district in Ohio. Now our standards exceed those of Mariemont, Oak Hills, Princeton, Sycamore, and Wyoming. We are serious about good education." By comparing Cincinnati to affluent, highly respected area schools, Brandt attempted to elevate respect for his school system.

## Conclusions

In most school districts throughout this country, the days are gone when

a few yard signs and an editorial or two will result in the passage of a school tax levy. According to Budget/Finance Campaigns (1977), "Now it takes an all-out effort by a great many educators, parents, civic groups, and interested citizens, welded into a highly functional campaign organization, to be successful at the polls with a school finance election" (p. 7). To meet these demands, advocates must employ rhetorical strategies adapted to the unique nature of ballot issue campaigns.

The 1991 Cincinnati tax levy campaign was successful largely because it adapted. First, it provided proactive leadership through public relations professionals and J. Michael Brandt, superintendent of Cincinnati schools. Second, it activated voters through registration, endorsements, and volunteers. Finally, the complex issues of the campaign were simplified, audiences targeted, and language strategies employed.

In this process, the essential functions of communication present in successful issue campaigns were satisfied: (1) education, (2) trust development, (3) promotion of a positive image, and (4) neutralization of the opposition (Carlin and Carlin).

This campaign educated voters by emphasizing specific steps taken in school reform. Proactive leadership earned community trust. A positive image was created by implementing sweeping changes in administration and school policies. Neutralization of the opposition was accomplished through the recruitment of key people into the campaign and the establishment of direct responses to opposition arguments.

Implications for Rhetorical Criticism. Thousands of school districts across the nation put tax proposals on the ballot each year. The challenges of these campaigns provide the communication scholar with intriguing questions

about the rhetorical nature of ballot issue campaigns. Further understanding of school finance campaigns not only adds to general knowledge of political communication, but may provide guidelines for "fitting responses" in future campaigns (Bitzer, pp. 10-11). A persuasive strategy that proves to be effective in Cincinnati may well be successful in Columbus or Buffalo or Portland because ballot issue campaigns share common characteristics.

All indications are that such direct participation in the local democratic process will continue to dominate political campaigns. The funding of our schools is one of the most fundamental tax issues. According to Estes (1974), "Our public schools are the last significant outpost of local control, ranking with town meetings found in small New England communities. Citizens participate directly and indirectly in school governance; they vote on levy and bond issues and in board elections; they speak out at board meetings; and they can run for the board with a limited budget and little red tape" (p. 15). In the present period of financial retrenchment, such fundamental tax issues become points of community controversy.

Further impetus for the study of issue campaigns is obvious when we survey past research on political events. Speech communication scholars have analyzed candidate races, especially at the national level, and neglected ballot issue campaigns. The increased frequency and importance of issue ballots at state and local levels warrants serious study from a communication perspective (Prentice and Carlin, 1987, p. 1).

Future Implications. Ballot issue campaigns may someday be used on a national level. According to Hall (1983), "Though direct legislation has traditionally been the purview of the states, the likelihood of a national referendum has been given some lipservice. Nuclear energy, ERA, and gun

control have all been mentioned prominently as possible national referendum possibilities" (p. 6). In 1978, Senator Charles Grassley of Iowa advocated a national referendum system because "it further extends the principles of our system of checks and balances. . . . ("Grassley Suggests," p. 1).

Recently, former presidential candidate H. Ross Perot expressed similar interest in a national referendum system that would allow American citizens to directly vote on raising taxes or going to war. While the Perot plan was attacked for being extra-constitutional (Will, 1992), the fact that such referenda systems continue to be discussed lends credibility to the argument that it is important to understand ballot issue campaigns. Whether or not national referenda are implemented, the financing of local education through tax levies is a current reality and such tax issues promise to remain controversial for years to come.

ENDNOTES

1. In Ohio, property tax levies are initiated by boards of education and voted upon by the electors in the school district. Under Ohio law, there are two types of tax levies available that provide additional operating revenue to meet current expenses: current operating levies and emergency levies (Whitman & Pittner, 1987). The 1991 Cincinnati Public Schools levy was a current operating levy.

2. The American Dictionary of Campaigns and Elections (Young, 1987) describes ballot propositions as: "Issues that are placed on the ballot to be voted on at the same time that a scheduled primary or general election is held. Ballot propositions are usually in the form of a question upon which voters are able to vote yes or no. Ballot propositions are widely used in the United States. In a typical general election, about 4 out of 5 states will decide statewide ballot issues."

3. Johnson (1990) divided 600 recent books and articles among the following five categories: (1) general study of political communication, (2) approaches to analyzing political communication, (3) forms of strategies, (4) the role of the media, and (5) women and politics.

4. Hall (1983) noted that a vast majority of literature on persuasive political campaigns has focused on one of three areas: (1) the explanation of campaign results with a principal focus on candidates and thus candidate-issue oriented; (2) impacts of media on election results; or (3) the examination of sociological, psychological, and political correlates of human behavior.

5. In those early days, the levy campaigns were organized and run by the Cincinnati Business Committee (CBC) (C. Schultze, personal interview, March 2, 1992). This committee included business people from several companies in Cincinnati. Ohio law prohibits a board of education from using school funds to "support or oppose the passage of a school levy or bond issue or to compensate any school district employee for time spent on any activity intended to influence the outcome of a school levy or bond issue election" (Ohio Revised Code, section 3517.01).

6. Although it was given the most attention, the television commercial was not the only broadcast message in the campaign. The Cincinnati Federation of Teachers funded a radio spot with the goal of reaching weekday commuters. The radio commercial carried the same audio message.

7. The use of endorsements to win an election is a strategy suggested in most school finance campaign resources (Goldstein, 1984; Banach, 1986; Nusbaum, 1987; Kromer, 1988; and Funk, 1990). Nusbaum noted (1987), "The creation of a winning attitude through the association of positive people in the campaign is of utmost importance" (p. 8).

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